



**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE HEELWORK TO MUSIC LIAISON
COUNCIL HELD AT 10.30 AM ON MONDAY 16 FEBRUARY 2026 VIA
MICROSOFT TEAMS**

PRESENT

Miss L Heath
Mrs D Heaton
Mrs E Higgins
Mrs C Knight
Mr R Moss
Miss L Reynolds
Miss E Stock

IN ATTENDANCE

Miss D Deuchar Senior Manager Canine Activities
Miss A Morley Activities Liaison Manager
Mrs E Osborne Activities Liaison Advisor

GUESTS

Mrs S Garner Board Member – Activities Committee Chair (*For items 1-5 only*)
Miss F McDonnell Health and Breeding Manager (*For item 4 only*)
Mrs H Lawrence Head of Education and Dog Training (*For item 5 only*)
Mrs F Moore Youth Training and Volunteer Development Manager (*For item 5 only*)

**ITEM 1. TO CONFIRM APPOINTMENT OF THE CHAIR FOR THE
COUNCIL TERM FOLLOWING A BALLOT CONDUCTED AT THE
HEELWORK TO MUSIC LIAISON COUNCIL INDUCTION SESSION**

1. It was noted that the Chair would attend the Activities Committee meeting to represent the views of the Liaison Council and that correspondence to the office on behalf of the Liaison Council should be sent through the Chair.
2. The office also reiterated the need for confidentiality on discussions and outcomes, until such time as the minutes of the meeting could be published.
3. The office confirmed that Mrs Knight had been duly elected at the Heelwork to Music Liaison Council Induction Session prior to the meeting.

IN THE CHAIR – Mrs C Knight

ITEM 2. TO CONFIRM APPOINTMENT OF THE VICE CHAIR FOR THE LIAISON COUNCIL TERM FOLLOWING A BALLOT CONDUCTED AT THE HEELWORK TO MUSIC LIAISON COUNCIL INDUCTION SESSION

4. The office confirmed that Mrs Higgins had been duly elected at the Heelwork to Music Liaison Council Induction Session prior to the meeting.

ITEM 3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

5. No apologies for absence had been received, as everyone was present.

ITEM 4. HEALTH AND WELFARE

6. The Liaison Council received a presentation from Miss F McDonnell (Health and Breeding Manager) on the new Breeding for Health Framework launched on 15 January 2026.
7. A query was raised about the Innate Health Assessment and whether a Royal Kennel Club initiative for a 'nose to tail' assessment would run entirely separate from that. It was confirmed that it was separate and would be a veterinary led assessment. There was no intention from the Royal Kennel Club to ban breeds, but they would continue to promote responsible breeding practices and discourage extreme conformations.
8. A brief discussion was held regarding the potential for the Activities Liaison Councils to assist the Health and Welfare team with future reviews. It was acknowledged that disciplines like Heelwork to Music could help promote good body conditioning and mental engagement and might support some breeds in strengthening and improving physical factors that were affected by genetic health conditions. Activities were therefore recognised as having potential value in contributing practical insight into how appropriate exercise and training could positively support health and welfare outcomes.
9. Miss McDonnell was thanked for her time and informative presentation.

ITEM 5. YOUNG ROYAL KENNEL CLUB & DOG TRAINING

10. The Liaison Council noted a verbal update from Mrs H Lawrence (Head of Education and Dog Training) and Mrs Fay Moore (Youth Training and Volunteer Development Manager).

11. A discussion was held about the potential for creating a new pathway for people into Heelwork to Music similar to the pathways for the Good Citizen scheme.
12. It was agreed that a meeting with the Young Royal Kennel Club team would be beneficial to discuss ideas and that this would be arranged later in the year. It was also confirmed by the office that emails sent to those who had completed Good Citizen awards would include links to activities offered including Heelwork to Music.
13. A query was raised regarding the best route of communication with the Young Royal Kennel Club, and Mrs Moore confirmed that members of the Liaison Council could email her directly if they had any urgent queries.
14. Mrs Lawrence and Mrs Moore were thanked for their time and informative presentation.
15. The Liaison Council was requested to consider allowing YRKC Heelwork to Music judges to be able to compete on the same day which they judged the YRKC classes, within agreed parameters. It was noted that this was not relevant for Heelwork to Music as judges were already able to compete on the same day that they judged classes.

ITEM 6. MATTERS ARISING/RESULTS OF RECOMMENDATIONS

16. The Liaison Council noted that the Board, at its meeting on 21 October 2025, approved the following amendments to L Regulations from 1 January 2026:

Amendment to regulations L2.a and L5

Regulation L2.a – Application

TO:

The application for a licence to hold a HTM competition must be made to the Secretary of The Royal Kennel Club, at least six ~~weeks~~ **months** before the proposed date of the competition, together with the appropriate licence fee. (Deletions struck through. Insertions in bold.)
(Effective 1 January 2026)

Regulation L5 – Societies are required to apply for permission to hold Special Events

TO:

Applications should be submitted to The Royal Kennel Club by email at least six ~~weeks~~ **months** before the start of any qualifying heats for the event. (Deletions struck through. Insertions in bold.)
(Effective 1 January 2026)

Amendment to regulations L12.c and L13

Regulation L12.c

TO:

c. For the duration of the competition and including those in the exercise area, all dogs must be on a lead except when competing, **undertaking a practice round, when a lead may be used** or practising prior to competition.

(Deletions struck through. Insertions in bold.)

(Effective 1 January 2026)

Regulation L13

TO:

Practice rounds are permitted at the judges' discretion and the judges' decision is final, provided their main purpose is to aid the dog's or handler's confidence and their experience of the working ring, and subject to the following:

- a. Where practise rounds are allowed, they must be available for all competitors in that class and must comply with the division entered.
- b. The time taken must not exceed the duration for routines at the relevant level.
- c. The use of toys which emit any noise, and the use of food are not permitted.
- d. The usual rules and etiquette for those who compete must be followed except that the handler may use as many cues as necessary to aid the dog, **the handler may attach a lead to the dog** and may touch the dog in a non-harmful and non-intimidating manner.
- e. Excessive exuberance from the handler or dog will not be permitted if the judge considers that it could interfere with the chances of winning of other dogs and handlers.

(Insertions in bold.)

(Effective 1 January 2026)

17. A concern was raised about liability of competition organisers should a handler trip on their own lead during a practice round. It was noted that the office was not aware of any reported incidents in any of the disciplines that allowed the use of leads and that those choosing to use leads in practice rounds did so at their own risk.
18. It was suggested that the use of leads offered additional motivation and security for those starting out in Heelwork to Music, and that it might have been more of an issue within freestyle routines than heelwork to music. It was noted that competitors could tailor their routines to reflect the need to use a lead and that the matter could be brought back for further discussion at the summer meeting if considered necessary.

ITEM 7. PANELS

19. The Liaison Council discussed the use of panels and following a brief discussion it was noted that the council did not consider the use of panels necessary at the current time. The decision reflected the view that the smaller Liaison Council was working effectively together, with members who specialised in particular areas appropriately leading discussions where relevant expertise was required.

ITEM 8. ACTIVITIES JUDGES SUB-GROUP

20. The Liaison Council noted that there was no update from the October meeting of the Activities Judges Sub Group.

21. The Liaison Council noted that the process for the mentoring scheme for new Heelwork to Music judges was changing, with applications being submitted to the Royal Kennel Club Judges Team who would work to match new judges with a suitable mentor.

22. The Liaison Council discussed the need for Accredited Trainers and the office confirmed that there had been some applications which were progressed to interview stage. It was noted that the representative appointed to the Activities Judges Sub Group would be responsible for leading communication with the Liaison Council and that this was discussed in interviews.

ITEM 9. JUDGES SURVEY

23. The Liaison Council discussed the findings of the recently conducted Judges Survey, undertaken by the Liaison Council members.
(Annex A refers)

24. The survey gathered responses on experience, training, and judging opportunities. Respondents represented a broad range of experience levels, from those in their first year of judging or currently undergoing mentorship, through to judges with over ten years experience. A small number indicated they competed but were not yet ready to judge or had no intention of pursuing judging roles.

25. Responses to the survey indicated variability in how frequently individuals were asked to judge. While some judges reported being asked regularly, others indicated they were seldom or never invited, suggesting an uneven distribution of judging appointments.

26. Overall, the survey indicated a generally engaged judging community with good uptake of seminars but highlighted some inconsistencies in mentoring

participation and access to judging appointments. The findings suggested a potential need for more structured pathways into judging and a more balanced allocation of judging opportunities.

27. The Liaison Council considered an amendment to the Guide for Heelwork to Music Judges to allow judges to inform competition organisers of their availability to judge until such time as Heelwork to Music judges could be added to the 'Find a Judge' system on the Royal Kennel Club website.
28. It was explained by the office that there was a difference between soliciting appointments and expressing availability to judge and that clubs in other disciplines often used social media to express a need for judges. It was noted that there was potential for communications to go out to explain this and that perks for judging, such as gifts and vouchers, were acceptable and were already frequently used in other disciplines.
29. The Liaison Council discussed the options for competition organisers to find judges and a query was raised about whether the Royal Kennel Club could publish a list of those who had passed the judging seminar. The office confirmed that this was not possible due to GDPR regulations.
30. The Liaison Council agreed that in that case it would be very useful for Heelwork to Music judges to be added to 'Find a Judge' on the Royal Kennel Club website.
31. The office confirmed that this was used for all levels of Dog Showing judges and panel judges for Field Trials but was only used for championship judges for Activities. It was noted the Liaison Councils comments would be passed on to see if adding other levels of activity judges could be a possibility for future.

ITEM 10. PROPOSALS FROM SOCIETIES/PRIVATE INDIVIDUALS

32. No proposals were received for the meeting.

To submit a proposal or discussion item, the community was invited to use the online form so the Heelwork to Music Liaison Council could discuss and review any suggestions prior to the next meeting in July. Submissions were accepted at any time of year via the online form: [Liaison Council Agenda Item](#).

ITEM 11. DISCUSSION ITEMS

33. The Liaison Council noted that no discussion items had been received for this meeting.

ITEM 12. STRATEGIC 5 YEAR PLAN

34. A brief discussion took place regarding a Strategic 5 Year Plan to align with the needs of Heelwork to Music, and it was agreed that it would be beneficial to create a new document that better reflected the new Liaison Councils aims.
35. It was noted that the Liaison Council sought to gather the community's views on priorities and, following the meeting, a survey was launched to identify the key areas the community wanted the Liaison Council to focus on.

ITEM 13. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

36. The council discussed potential Crufts judges for 2027 and 2028, and a list of suggestions was compiled. This had been sent to the Crufts committee for review.

ITEM 14. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

37. The Liaison Council noted that the date of the next meeting would be 20 July 2026.
38. The meeting ended at 12.30pm.

THE ROYAL KENNEL CLUB'S STRATEGIC AIMS

- Champion the wellbeing of dogs
- Safeguard and enhance the future of pedigree dogs, addressing breed-associated health issues
- Protect the future of dog activities together with our grassroots network
- Become relevant to more dog owners to increase our impact
- Deliver an excellent member experience and widen our community
- Ensure we are financially secure and sustainable